

The Saskatchewan First Nations Technical Services Co-operative

Unique Challenges, Unique Solutions

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Centre for the
Study of Co-operatives

Who we are

- Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan
- An interdisciplinary centre of higher learning that provides people with conceptual and informational tools to understand co-operatives and to develop them as solutions to economic and social needs.
- Three main focus areas; the co-operative model, co-operative governance and the co-operative difference.

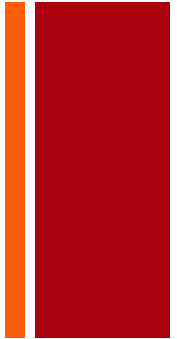
Co-ops 101



- Simplest definition – organizations that are created and owned by the members that use and/or benefit from the goods or services the organization provides
- Many types (producer, consumer, worker), can be owned at the individual level (1st tier), or at the organizational level (2nd tier), or higher (co-operatives of organizations representing organizations)



Co-operatives and Indigenous Communities



- Literature reviews and practitioner views are divided on the relationship between co-operatives and Indigenous worldviews
 - Some feel there are colonial overtones to previous co-operative development and that the overtly political nature of many Indigenous communities may pose unique challenges to co-operative models
 - Some feel is that there should be a natural fit of the model due to alignment of values
- Regardless, there are not ‘many’ Indigenous Co-operatives



Shared Values of First Nations and Co-ops



Co-operative Development



- The Co-operative Innovation Project identified that some parts co-operative development may need to be thought about differently when working with Indigenous communities
- Outside of the steps of developing co-operatives, it identified 4 environmental cultures that impact co-operative development – community, political, co-operative, and business



Connect

**Co-operative
Culture**

**Community
Culture**

**Political
Culture**

**Business
Culture**

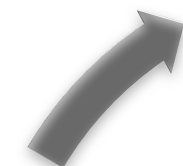
Thrive

Inspire

Explore

Create

Catalysts



Governance



- Simplest definition – who gets to decide what for whom
- Governance is inherently connected to power, and the ability to decide who wins and who loses through decisions taken by an organization
- The main concerns:
 - Managing Strategic Interdependencies – making sure all the stakeholders are in agreement and working to similar ends
 - Aligning and Interpreting Cognitive Frames – making sure decision makers interpret the same understanding
 - Establishing and Maintaining Legitimacy – creating and maintaining legitimate right to govern



Policy Implementation



- Kingdon et al.
 - Political conditions – problems, proposals, and politics
 - Policy windows (change in administration, legislation, ideologies, players, or activity)
 - Problem recognition – situations shift contrary to expectations, requires interpretation as a problem
 - Framing the problem, values conflicts
 - Policy Entrepreneurs (focus attention on the problem)
 - Timing is crucial
 - All things must come together



Research Question



- Why might Indigenous organizations choose to use the co-operative model to organize the provision of goods and services at the inter Tribal/Agency/Grand Council level?
- What are the cultural community and political factors that may play a role in these decisions?
- What are the governance implications of the model that was ultimately chosen?

- Limitations – very few examples exist to choose from – at best this case should be considered exploratory

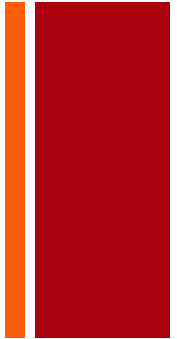


Case Selection



- **First Nations Technical Services Co-operative (FNTSC)**
 - Between January 2014 and October 2015, under the leadership of the FSIN, a new entity was created to coordinate the provision of technical and emergency services for First Nations at the provincial level
 - The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives was approached in December of 2014 to provide guidance and information on the co-operative model

Methodology

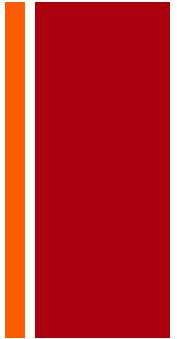


■ Methodology

- Literature Review – Policy development, Indigenous economic and social development, governance, co-operative development, collective action
- Document Review – FSIN briefing notes and technical reports, news articles, FNTSC planning documents
- Guided Interviews – Centre staff, FSIN staff and board members of the FNTSC



The Case – Setting the Stage



- Saskatchewan population is approximately 9% Indigenous
- There are 74 First Nations organized into 10 Tribal/Agency/Ground Councils, and 9 Independent Nations
- The Councils work on behalf of their First Nations members to provide administrative organization and second level service delivery
- The FSIN represents all the First Nations and Tribal councils. It acts as an advocacy, organizing, and accountability agency.



Technical Services in Saskatchewan



- Technical Services funded at the Council and/or First Nation level through government transfer, grants and contribution agreements include activities such as: inspections, training, mapping, design, and other services.
- Different communities and Councils have different capacities for organization, and delivery of services
 - Impacted by competing needs for resources, by availability of educated and trained technicians in rural First Nations, high turn-over of staff, and 'non-sexy' portfolio
- Technical services technicians met and shared resources in the province, and received some high level coordination through FSIN. Great deal of local autonomy



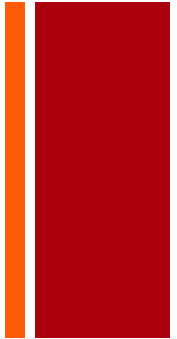
Technical Services Elsewhere



- Both Alberta and Ontario have provincial apex bodies – TSAG and OFNTSC. Other provinces operate at the individual First Nation or Council level
- These organizations were established in the 1990s during a previous period of funding and responsibility changes
- TSAG operates as a federally incorporated not for profit with the Chiefs as the sole members, so they elect and appoint the board of directors
- OFNTSC operates as a provincial corporation. They have a board made up of reps from Tribal Councils, large First Nations and unaffiliated First Nations.



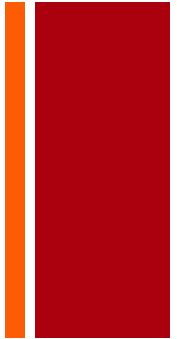
Setting the Stage – Relations with the Government



- October 2012 – the Harper government tabled Bill C-45, Omnibus budget bill containing many changes affecting Indigenous peoples
- November 18, 2012 - The Idle No More movement opposes Bill C-45
- In late 2013 the Federal Government began exploring aggregated funding models for programs typically delivered through Tribal Councils
- January 2014 – AANDC (INAC) cut funding to FSIN by \$1.1M
- Federal government recommending provincial fire, building and infrastructure standards followed on reserve as part of a broader strategy



Proposal – January 2014



- Create a province wide technical services organization
- Rationale
 - To avoid hiring non-First Nations contractors
 - Avoid spending First Nations dollars in the private sector
 - Prevent the organization of an 'outside' agency
 - Build own capacity
 - Supply services to their own communities
- Goals
 - High quality services available on an equal basis to all First Nations
 - Develop capacity not currently in Saskatchewan due to lack of economy of scale
 - Develop Capacity of First Nations to collectively self manage programs
 - Create stable employment opportunities for technicians



Institutions Created by FSIN in Saskatchewan



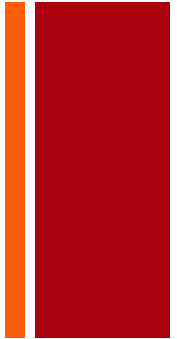
- Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre - 1972
- First Nations University of Canada – 1976
- Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies – 1976
- Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation – 1986
- Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority – 1995
- First Nations Bank – 1997
- Indian Gaming Regulators – 2003
- Saskatchewan First Nations Natural Resource Centre of Excellence - 2009

Concerns



- FSIN does not have the mandate to offer direct provision of services
- Councils and First Nations do not want centralized decision making out of the communities, or centralization of human resources out of their communities
- Awareness of political concerns in governance of other created institutions. Don't want access or provision of service to become politicized.
- Not sure that benefits outweigh potential costs of changing the current structure

Proposal - March 2014



- Not proposing a one-decision authority body
- Tribal Councils remain main provider
- Can fill service gaps, and represent all First Nations, including independents – a support organization, not a replacement or competing organization
- Can bid on contracts or act as flow-through for the Tribal Councils
- Steering committee of leadership and technicians put together, FSIN coordinate meetings, conduct research and provide options, but Councils and First Nations will provide direction and support
- FSIN received project funding from AANDC “Developing a Governance Structure to Support the Implementation of a Saskatchewan First Nations Technical Service Provider”



Roadblocks



- There is an agreement on the problem, and the need to coordinate resources, but there are concerns about organizational form, and fear of changing the system to something unknown
- During consultations, concerns were raised about how to maintain primary role and resource maintenance of Councils and Nations
- Concerns that replicating structures of other organizations would replicate political influences and concerns
- The suggestion was made to consult with professors at the University, and the question was posed, “What about a co-op?”



Feb 2015 Presentation to Tribal Council Technical Services Group



■ Concerns

- The situation is changing as development is occurring
 - Is this fear mongering?
 - What if we didn't need to organize and we did
 - No appetite for new institutions
-
- What is the risk of staying as is?
 - Will be patchwork in offering (similar to RM delivery)
 - First Nations money continues to flow out First Nations hands
 - At risk for others moving into jurisdiction
 - Can only offer limited programs and services



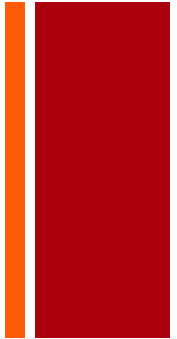
The Situation Continues to Change



- Dec 2014 – woman and toddler die in a house fire on Ahtahkakoop First Nation
- Feb 17, 2015 – 2 toddlers died on the Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation west of Meadow Lake – nearby fire services did not respond due to a dispute over unpaid bills
- Federal Gov't begins discussions with province to see if there is interest in the province assuming responsibility for Emergency services on reserve, with additional funds of \$10M



March 6, 2015



- Proposing a technical services co-operative
- Development Principles
 - Member driven decision making; provision of high quality, standardized, efficient services; skilled job creation; unified voice for members; retain Tribal Council jurisdictional control
- Board Responsibilities
 - Establish structure; ensure rules on member control/benefits are agreed upon by all; develop bylaws and governance manuals; determine treatment of members versus non-members
- FSIN Executive Council passed a motion supporting development of a technical services co-operative



March 2015 - Political Situation



- March 6 – FSIN interim chief states they can manage own emergency services, requests the \$10M be transferred to support the start of the technical and emergency services co-op, highly concerned about jurisdictional infringement
- March 9 – Sk Government Relations Minister states that FSIN was contacted about the proposal, just not at first because they needed to see if an agreement could be reached between the federal and provincial governments first.
- “We just think that in view of tragedies that have happened over the past couple of months, there’s been children tragically dying in house fires, this isn’t something to get hung up on jurisdiction”



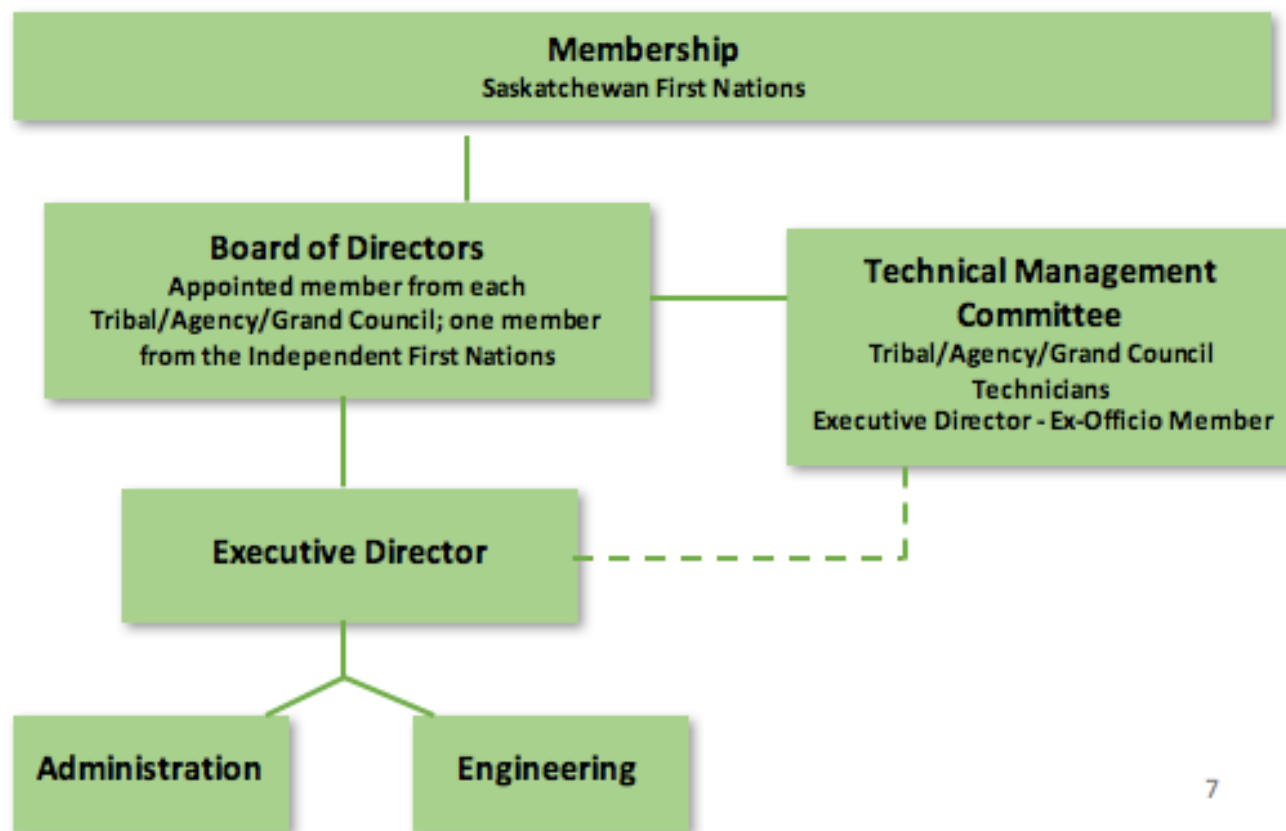
April 2015 - Present



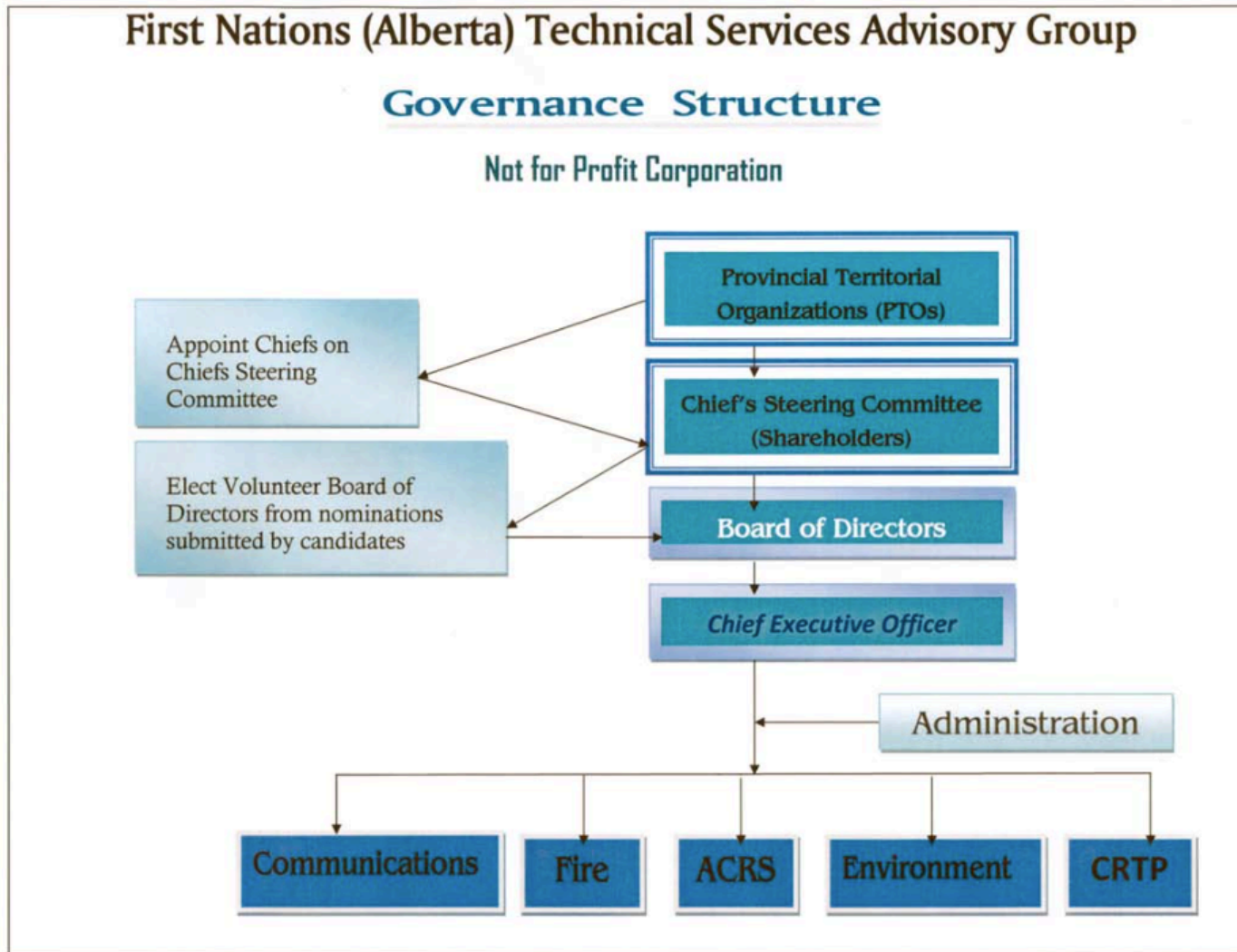
- Full consultation and needs analysis completed through the summer
- Ongoing committee meetings to determine governance structure, create bylaws and governance materials
- September 2015 – resolution 1964 was passed to approve the Technical Services Co-operative
- October 2015 – Saskatchewan First Nations Technical Services Co-operative is incorporated
- Today – board is in place and functional, the first contribution agreement has been applied for and approved (awaiting funds) and are recruiting the executive director



SFNTSC Governance Structure



TSAG - Governance



Analysis – Political Factors



- Respects and embeds adherence to existing political structures in the organization, and overcomes coordination problems amongst actors
- Decision making retained in development at the community level, coordinated but not directed by, FSIN
- Early discussions were proactive, because typically not a high profile portfolio, until it was because of focusing events, then the co-operative became a solution
- Sovereignty was threatened, changes in funding allocations and patterns combined with impacts of focusing events
- Structure allows for unified voice for advocacy, transparency of decision and improved service outcomes



Analysis – Community/Cultural Factors



- Resources (funding coming in, maintenance and creation of skilled employment) should be protected at the community/Council/provincial level
- All First Nations should have access to high quality and equal service provision
- First Nations money should go to First Nations people, and there should be First Nations firms providing technical and professional services
- Existing working relationships among technical services technicians and a history of sharing tools and best practices
- Solutions should be First Nations driven



Analysis – Questions of Governance



- Managing Interdependencies – relationships between and among stakeholders
 - Connect the government, chiefs, and existing political structures to the governance of the new organization
 - Ensure the stakeholders see not only gain for group as a whole, but also avoidance of loss for selves; organization is not a competitor.
- Cognitive Frames
 - Erosion of sovereignty/relationship with government, reduction of funding, preference of government for aggregated service agreements, protectionism of resources at local/council/provincial level
- Establishment and Maintenance of Legitimacy
 - Following established processes and lines of approval from community, members, chiefs and government for organization



So What



- An interesting example of alternate model of organization of larger organizations to harness collective strength
- Shows some potential model for co-operation at community level to maintain autonomy and protect resources, yet still harness economies of scale
- Most critical problem was addressing the governance issue, the co-op model was a solution to this problem, not the starting point
- Even at the 2nd tier level, politics in Indigenous communities must be understood, respected, and embedded in the solutions





Questions?



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